



The Episcopal Diocese of the Central Gulf Coast

Sabbatical Policy

(approved by Standing Committee August 10, 2021)

The Diocese of the Central Gulf Coast encourages clergy to take sabbaticals for their renewal and refreshment and the benefit of the congregation. The purpose of a Sabbatical leave is to provide an opportunity for those on Sabbatical Leave to rest. God thought it was good for himself, surely it is good for God's people. In this regard, clergy are to be models to God's people. It is, therefore, incumbent on them to be deliberate in taking regular times for the rest which allows replenishment of the body and the spirit. Sabbaticals are in addition to regularly scheduled vacation times and are not to be confused with sick leave or any other kind of leave.

When clergy are making plans for Sabbatical Leave, s/he is required to consult with and notify the Bishop well in advance. It is also recommended that the clergy work with a mentor, usually a colleague chosen by the clergy or suggested by the Bishop, to assist with developing their Sabbatical Plan. The clergy returning from Sabbatical Leave may wish to "debrief" with the same mentor. The Bishop shall be informed of the dates of Sabbatical Leave in advance and notified when the clergy officially returns from their sabbatical.

POLICY OVERVIEW:

- The Bishop expects that all full-time clergy in the Diocese will have Sabbatical Leave included in their Letter of Agreement. **Effective September 1, 2021**, all clergy newly entering the Diocese will have Sabbatical Leave included in their letters of agreement. This Sabbatical Leave policy is intended for full-time clergy canonically resident in the Diocese; retired/pensioned clergy are usually not considered eligible for Sabbatical Leave.
- The Diocese recommends a sabbatical up to but no more than **three (3) consecutive months, following at least six (6) years of consecutive service**.
- While on sabbatical, the clergy is to receive full compensation from the congregation; they are considered "actively employed" for purposes of insurance coverage.
- **Vestries should plan for Sabbatical Leave** by annually setting aside a reasonable amount to be placed in a reserve fund for the benefit of the congregation and the clergy. These funds are to be used to offset the cost of the sabbatical and to pay for supply clergy coverage during the sabbatical.

- Clergy should explore whether sabbatical funding might be available through the **National Clergy Renewal Program funded by the Lilly Foundation** (visit <https://www.cts.edu/clergy-renewal/applying/national-program/>). Clergy may apply for up to a \$50,000 grant, depending on their proposed program, of which up to \$15,000 of the grant may be used to help the congregation fulfill pastoral duties during the clergy's absence. Note that deadlines are well in advance of the intended sabbatical (usually in the Spring of the year prior).
- In addition, the **Diocese has developed a Sabbatical Fund** for full-time, canonically resident clergy. In consultation with the Standing Committee, the Bishop shall match the local congregation's contribution to the sabbatical, up to a maximum of \$4,000. The actual amount awarded shall take into account the congregation's financial capacity, the church's annual contribution to the diocese, the length of the sabbatical, and the length of tenure in the diocese by the clergy seeking a financial grant. A Sabbatical Plan shall be provided to the Bishop prior to any distribution of funds. In most cases part-time / retired / pensioned clergy are not eligible for this fund.
- **Clergy returning from sabbatical are expected to serve at least six months post-sabbatical**, except in extraordinary circumstances and only with the approval of the Bishop. Clergy should not take a sabbatical if they intend to leave the congregation or retire upon completion of the sabbatical. Clergy should not use sabbatical time to look for another call.
- Sabbatical reserve funds belong to the congregation, and clergy who leave a congregation without having taken a sabbatical are not entitled to those funds.
- Clergy may not be "compensated in lieu of" if Sabbatical Leave is not utilized.
- Paid sabbatical time is in addition to paid vacation time for the year in which the sabbatical is taken. Annual leave may be used in conjunction with Sabbatical Leave if planned in advance with their vestry. **Sabbatical Leave qualifies for continuing education**; therefore, the clergy's continuing education funds may be eligible for use during sabbatical.

NOTE:

A question was raised as to why the time clergy worked at a previous church is not included in the accrual of the consecutive service period. As noted in the policy, sabbaticals are a benefit provided by a church employer. A supporting church recognizes that a sabbatical is both a time commitment and financial investment in their clergy. A sabbatical and the preparation for it are times of intentional, focused reflection, and renewal for the priest. This may also be true for the congregation. The sabbatical time period may provide an opportunity for church laity to re-engage with their ministries and worship services. The expectation at the completion of a sabbatical is a revitalized clergy and a more engaged congregation which can lead to a more empowered, enriched, and enhanced congregation.

By considering the inclusion of time working at another parish in addition to the sending church, a sabbatical would be considered less of a mutual relationship or investment, but rather one of a transactional benefit. By accepting a new call, the clergy should accept that they are arriving ready to engage in the longer-term life of the congregation. If the clergy believes they need to

utilize a sabbatical benefit early, it should be part of the discussions and part of the Letter of Agreement at the time of their appointment. However, it does not preclude a sabbatical negotiated at a later date, if less than the 6-year timeframe (which is the average standard in most dioceses).

Again, it's important to ensure that there is an agreement in the clergy's Letter of Agreement at the time of their call or appointment. This policy is intended to ensure all parties understand the importance of a sabbatical for clergy and to provide the general framework for both parties to support and plan for this important renewal.

PLANNING:

The clergy will inform the vestry of sabbatical plans well in advance and will assist the wardens in finding appropriate clergy support while away. The clergy should provide the congregation with a Sabbatical Plan or other necessary information such as:

- A summary statement describing the overall character and purpose of the sabbatical,
- A clearly articulated rationale for engaging in the sabbatical,
- A narrative description of the clergy's activities and timeline during the sabbatical,
- A statement of the intended benefits to both the clergy and the congregation,
- A description of the congregation's plans for covering the necessary pastoral and liturgical functions during the sabbatical,
- A plan for how the clergy and congregation will communicate and share insights from the sabbatical with one another after the clergy's return.

Parishes with more than one clergy on staff and Missions and smaller Parishes (served by only one clergy) are urged to develop partnerships with one another regarding supply clergy during Sabbatical Leave. Larger Parishes may help Missions and smaller Parishes whose clergy are on sabbatical, by offering supply Priests or Deacons at no cost to the smaller congregations. Use of Morning Prayer by lay leadership is also encouraged.

RECONNECTING:

A critical part of the program is intentional time of reconnecting and debriefing; to share learning and insights.

- While it is not expected that the clergy will return from a sabbatical with a tangible "product", it is reasonable to expect a report on their activities post-sabbatical, highlighting ways in which their spiritual journey has been impacted by the experience.
- It is expected that the specifics or method of this reentry for the congregation and the clergy will be part of the Sabbatical Plan.
- Liturgical recognition and corporate prayers at the beginning, during, and at the return of the clergy are appropriate.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION BY CLERGY AND CONGREGATION

Suggested questions for the clergy:

- What particular aspect(s) of ministry has (have) been life-giving to you in the past few years?
- What aspect of your ministry has drained or depleted you?
- Is there something other than years of service that is prompting you to request a sabbatical at this particular time?
- When you think about the possibility of significant time away from the congregation, what excites you? What do you fear?
- As you look forward to the next five to seven years of congregational ministry, what do you long for?
- How will a sabbatical affect your family?
- What themes, questions, or area of study do you intend to pursue during your sabbatical?
- How do you see these themes, questions, or areas of study relating to your ministry in your current congregation at this particular time?
- What is your sense of the vestry's and wardens' commitment to this program?
- In what ways do you think the congregation will benefit from your sabbatical?

Suggested questions for the vestry or sabbatical planning committee:

- What aspect of congregational life has been particularly fruitful or rich the past few years?
- What aspect of congregational life has seemed exhausted, stale, or in need of revitalization?
- When you think about your clergy's absence for an extended period of time, what do you fear? What excites you?
- What themes, questions, or areas of reflection might the congregation pursue during the time of the sabbatical?
- If you could recommend areas of rest, renewal, and revitalization for your clergy during sabbatical, what might they be? What prompts your answer?
- In what ways do you hope the congregation will benefit from the sabbatical?
- What do you need from the Bishop, diocesan staff, or neighboring congregations in order to enter into the sabbatical time without anxiety?

A COLLECT FOR THE GOOD USE OF LEISURE

O God, in the course of this busy life, give us times of refreshment and peace; and grant that we may so use our leisure to rebuild our bodies and renew our minds, that our spirits may be opened to the goodness of your creation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*